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## Letters

### Artificial distinction?

In "Culture puts unique spin on moral judgment" (SN: 5/2/92, p.295) the distinction the Yale researchers made between an interpersonal choice and a justice judgment seems artificial.

The fact that Indians preferred meeting the personal obligation to deliver wedding rings to a friend by taking a train ticket from a stranger reflects a cultural emphasis on social duties and responsibilities toward those with whom they identify but not toward strangers. Some of the U.S. responders may have chosen not to take the ticket because they felt a broader interpersonal connection and social obligation that encompasses strangers (a Christian social teaching) and not because of a sense of legal justice. After all, the stranger might not be able to buy another ticket because he has a desperate need for his money—a more vital need than the friend has for wedding rings.

Both Indian and U.S. responders made what

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Cover: "Golden skins" refers not only to the color but also to the value of chemicals called alkaloids found in these poison frogs. Years of searching have yielded potential medicines as well as much information about these curious creatures. This species, like other dendrobatid frogs, befuddles scientists by displaying a range of colors, carrying a range of chemicals, and caring for their young. (Photo: George Grall, National Aquarium, Baltimore)



### Departments

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Science Service, a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921, gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Program it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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they considered a just choice. What is considered just in a society involves a weighing of diverse needs and is shaped by whose needs are given priority weighting in the culture. These cultural priorities, whether codified or commonly understood social rules, provide a framework for common, predictable behavior choices, thereby avoiding social confusion and insecurity as well as reducing the pressure on the individual to constantly weigh choices.

If we are going to cooperate successfully in our increasingly interdependent multicultural world, we need better studies of the unique spin each culture puts on moral judgments.

Marilyn Kramer  
Lake Tomahawk, Wis.

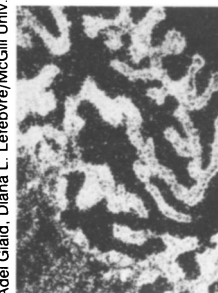
All study participants considered their moral choices "just," but the researchers looked at the contrasting assumptions that guide "justice" and "interpersonal" obligations. Contrary to your suggestion, Yale's Joan Miller found that Indians tend to view helping both friends and strangers as an obligation within the scope of legitimate

regulation. Moreover, volunteers clearly understood that the stranger had enough money to buy another ticket; in the United States, they emphasized justice rationales for their decisions.

Moral reasoning studies indeed need larger and broader samples, but the Yale project provides intriguing clues for further investigation.

— B. Bower

### CORRECTION



In this photograph of rat uterine tissue, which accompanied "Explanation for premature and delayed labor" (SN: 6/13/92, p.389), the oxytocin gene's activity shows up as white regions, not dark ones as stated in the caption.

Adel Giard, Diana L. Lefebvre/McGill Univ.

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